

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

552

June 2, 2014

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Wheeler, Commissioner Clyburn, Commissioner Rosenworcel, Commissioner Pai, and Commissioner O’Rielly:

As Members of Congress committed to improving our education system through innovation and preparing our students for 21st century jobs, we write in support of modernizing the E-rate program to help connect our nation’s schools and libraries to high-speed broadband over the next five years. America’s schools and libraries are in need of a technological update to accelerate next-generation education reforms, support teachers, and enhance student learning through universal access to high-speed broadband. Technology has dramatically changed since the E-rate program was established 18 years ago, and the funding priorities must reflect the changing nature of the Internet, so that our classrooms and students have access to today’s technology.

Closing the education and access gap starts with extending digital opportunities across America to all of our students. This requires ensuring that our schools and libraries can take advantage of new technologies and high-quality educational content. However, many of our schools do not have the Internet speed needed to take advantage of digital learning opportunities. Experts agree that to enable students to take full advantage of digital learning, America’s schools should aim for 100 Mbps of bandwidth or more for every 1,000 students and staff members today, and 1 Gbps by 2017. The E-rate program has the ability to make these updates and bring our Internet services in line with global, competitive standards. Fifty major CEOs recognize the importance of updating this program for American competitiveness, and stated so in a similar letter to the FCC earlier this year.

Improving our education system and preparing our students for 21st century jobs is a bipartisan priority. We are proud to support, in a bipartisan manner, the recommended update to the E-rate program. We believe the FCC should:

1. Focus E-rate on broadband services, Wi-Fi updates, and filling the infrastructure gap, with continued support for connectivity services, to ensure universal access to the most up to date technology;
2. Ensure that schools and libraries are paying for the best service at the lowest price through competitive Internet service offerings and purchaser coordination, so that the program’s money is spent smarter and spread wider;
3. Increase transparency and accountability for the program in order to reduce costs, share data collected to improve best practices, and ensure that all students have access to the connectivity they need;

4. Ensure that program rules result in funding stability to improve program efficiency and schools' financial planning, particularly for broadband connections within schools and libraries (particularly Wi-Fi) where there has been a lack of certainty in the past; and
5. Simplify and streamline the application process.

As a recent Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development report found, the United States is behind most developed countries in digital literacy skills. In order to improve our digital literacy skills, we must begin by ensuring reliable and universal access to the Internet in our classrooms and libraries. Therefore, we urge the Commission to move forward on modernizing the E-rate program and increase access to high-speed broadband for our students.

Sincerely,



Ron Kind
Member of Congress



Charles W. Dent
Member of Congress



Jared Polis
Member of Congress



Chris Gibson
Member of Congress



Suzan DelBene
Member of Congress



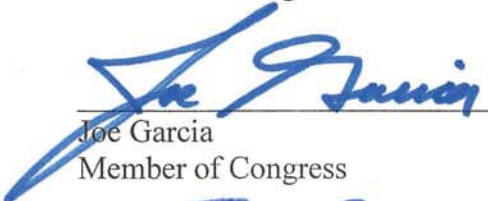
Adam Kinzinger
Member of Congress



John K. Delaney
Member of Congress



Richard L. Hanna
Member of Congress



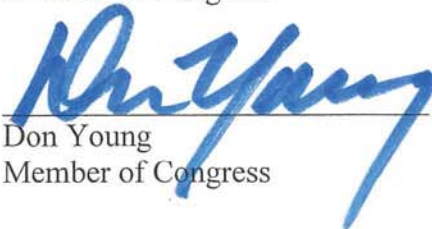
Joe Garcia
Member of Congress



Markwayne Mullin
Member of Congress



Scott Peters
Member of Congress



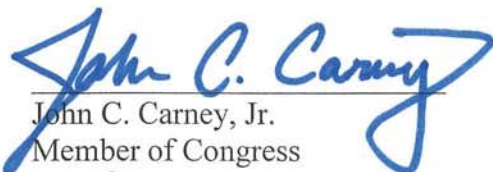
Don Young
Member of Congress



Ron Barber
Member of Congress



Lois Capps
Member of Congress



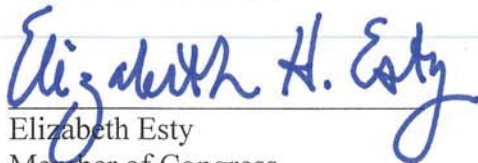
John C. Carney, Jr.
Member of Congress



Gerald E. Connolly
Member of Congress



Susan Davis
Member of Congress



Elizabeth Esty
Member of Congress



Pete Gallego
Member of Congress



James A. Himes
Member of Congress



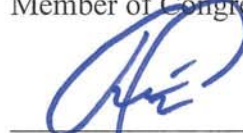
Steve Israel
Member of Congress



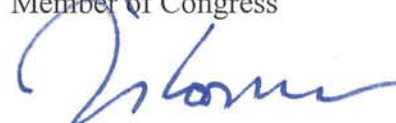
Ami Bera, M.D.
Member of Congress




Tony Cárdenas
Member of Congress



André Carson
Member of Congress



Jim Cooper
Member of Congress



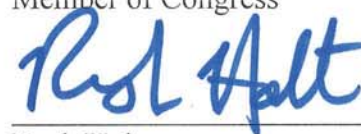
Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress



Bill Foster
Member of Congress



Denny Heck
Member of Congress



Rush Holt
Member of Congress



Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress



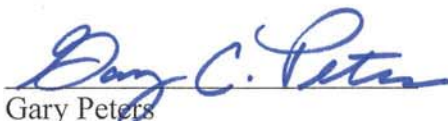
Ann Kirkpatrick
Member of Congress




Carolyn McCarthy
Member of Congress



William Owens
Member of Congress



Gary Peters
Member of Congress



Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress



Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress



Kurt Schrader
Member of Congress



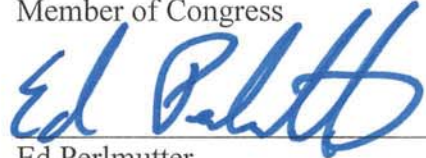
Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress



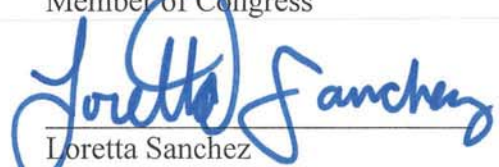
Patrick Murphy
Member of Congress



Ed Perlmutter
Member of Congress



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress



Loretta Sanchez
Member of Congress



Bradley Schneider
Member of Congress



David Scott
Member of Congress



Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

June 16, 2014

The Honorable Derek Kilmer
U.S. House of Representatives
1429 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Kilmer:

Thank you for sharing your views on the importance of modernizing the E-Rate program to provide high-speed broadband to and within all of our nation's schools and libraries. I agree with each of the recommendations in your letter and hope to soon be able to adopt an Order beginning the process of E-rate modernization consistent with the approach you have outlined.

Since its creation as part of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the E-Rate program has provided crucial support to meet the technology needs of schools and libraries. But just as technology and teaching have evolved over the past two decades, so too must E-Rate. The technology tools that supported the educational needs of the Class of 1998 bear virtually no resemblance to those the Classes of 2015 and beyond need to succeed in the 21st Century.

I am especially concerned about the lack of robust Wi-Fi in schools and libraries. Unfortunately, nearly 60% of schools in America lack sufficient Wi-Fi to provide their students and teachers with modern educational tools, and far too many schools simply have no Wi-Fi at all. The current E-rate program rules are simply not set up to meet this challenge. In the most recent funding year, no E-Rate funding was allocated to Wi-Fi. In previous years, when funds were available, E-Rate supported internal connections like Wi-Fi to less than 10 percent of schools and just one percent of libraries, with rural schools consistently receiving a very small percentage of funding for in-classroom connectivity. This is unacceptable.

The main reason for this problem is that there is no certainty within the current system. Schools do not know if they will qualify from year to year. Funds for Wi-Fi are provided on a secondary basis and are only available once all "priority one" requests are funded. I have seen firsthand that Wi-Fi is as important as any other form of Internet access in today's schools and libraries and believe the E-rate program should provide substantially greater predictability in funding for Wi-Fi going forward. Every school district and library should know that funding for Wi-Fi will be available to them over a multi-year period so they can effectively plan for the future. Far more rural schools would benefit compared to the current system and such changes could be made while

maintaining a hallmark of the E-rate program – providing the highest discounts for those schools that need it the most and providing an additional discount for certain rural schools.

In addition to rethinking how we provide support for Wi-Fi, we also need to address funding levels. Just last week I received a letter from 106 organizations calling for an increase in E-rate spending and noting that “the program has effectively been shortchanged by not having any CPI [consumer price index] increase for the first fourteen years of the program.” Others have also called for an inflation adjustment to the program’s budget. Had such a rule been in place when the program was launched, the Commission would provide approximately \$3.25 billion in E-rate support in the upcoming funding year. I am pleased to say that, due to efforts of the Commission’s staff this year in improving the overall management and administration of the E-rate program, funds will be made available that can be put to use to enable the Commission to provide more than that CPI-adjusted level of funding in 2015. As I announced earlier this year, using these already collected funds, the Commission will invest an additional \$2 billion in broadband for schools and libraries while continuing to assess the long-term funding needs of the program.

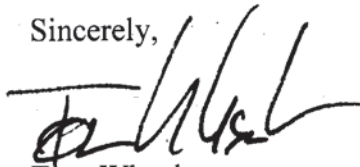
As a first step, I believe we should put those resources to work now to meet our educators’ pent-up demand for upgrading Wi-Fi. But how and when we put those resources to work is very important. According to internal staff estimates, allocating an additional \$1 billion to Wi-Fi next year without updated program rules will allow us to reach fewer than 4 million students, mostly in urban areas. With modernized rules for internal connections, however, E-Rate could help over 10 million students connect to Wi-Fi in their classrooms, including many in rural areas. It would also support Wi-Fi deployment in substantially more libraries than in the past. But timing is critical. Practically speaking, to have an impact in the 2015 school year, the Commission will need to act this summer to adopt new rules. If we don’t move quickly on new rules, we will miss the opportunity for Wi-Fi to have its greatest impact in the coming funding year.

As you correctly point out, there are several other important issues. My focus on Wi-Fi is not to suggest that other steps should not also be taken to modernize the program. I agree that we need to make the hard decision now to begin transitioning the program away from non-broadband services and to broadband services. I also share your goal of ensuring that these funds are spent wisely on the best service at the lowest price in order to stretch these funds to reach as many schools as possible. It is called the E-rate program for a reason, and it is our responsibility to facilitate access to the best possible services at the lowest possible rates. We can take specific actions to address this issue by, for example, facilitating consortium-based applications and requiring greater transparency in the program so that all E-rate beneficiaries have the best possible information when making purchasing decisions. I am also firmly committed to streamlining the application process. Today, for example, I am pleased to say that the Commission has already committed over \$1 billion for the 2014 funding year, which

includes over \$700 million in broadband-related funding – a milestone that has been achieved a full three months faster than in the previous funding year.

E-rate modernization is one of the most important issues before the Commission today. We have an opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of millions of students. Thank you again for your very helpful recommendations. I look forward to working with you toward our mutual goal of increased access to high-speed broadband in our nation's schools.

Sincerely,



Tom Wheeler



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

June 16, 2014

The Honorable Tony Cardenas
U.S. House of Representatives
1508 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Cardenas:

Thank you for sharing your views on the importance of modernizing the E-Rate program to provide high-speed broadband to and within all of our nation's schools and libraries. I agree with each of the recommendations in your letter and hope to soon be able to adopt an Order beginning the process of E-rate modernization consistent with the approach you have outlined.

Since its creation as part of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the E-Rate program has provided crucial support to meet the technology needs of schools and libraries. But just as technology and teaching have evolved over the past two decades, so too must E-Rate. The technology tools that supported the educational needs of the Class of 1998 bear virtually no resemblance to those the Classes of 2015 and beyond need to succeed in the 21st Century.

I am especially concerned about the lack of robust Wi-Fi in schools and libraries. Unfortunately, nearly 60% of schools in America lack sufficient Wi-Fi to provide their students and teachers with modern educational tools, and far too many schools simply have no Wi-Fi at all. The current E-rate program rules are simply not set up to meet this challenge. In the most recent funding year, no E-Rate funding was allocated to Wi-Fi. In previous years, when funds were available, E-Rate supported internal connections like Wi-Fi to less than 10 percent of schools and just one percent of libraries, with rural schools consistently receiving a very small percentage of funding for in-classroom connectivity. This is unacceptable.

The main reason for this problem is that there is no certainty within the current system. Schools do not know if they will qualify from year to year. Funds for Wi-Fi are provided on a secondary basis and are only available once all "priority one" requests are funded. I have seen firsthand that Wi-Fi is as important as any other form of Internet access in today's schools and libraries and believe the E-rate program should provide substantially greater predictability in funding for Wi-Fi going forward. Every school district and library should know that funding for Wi-Fi will be available to them over a multi-year period so they can effectively plan for the future. Far more rural schools would benefit compared to the current system and such changes could be made while

maintaining a hallmark of the E-rate program – providing the highest discounts for those schools that need it the most and providing an additional discount for certain rural schools.

In addition to rethinking how we provide support for Wi-Fi, we also need to address funding levels. Just last week I received a letter from 106 organizations calling for an increase in E-rate spending and noting that “the program has effectively been shortchanged by not having any CPI [consumer price index] increase for the first fourteen years of the program.” Others have also called for an inflation adjustment to the program’s budget. Had such a rule been in place when the program was launched, the Commission would provide approximately \$3.25 billion in E-rate support in the upcoming funding year. I am pleased to say that, due to efforts of the Commission’s staff this year in improving the overall management and administration of the E-rate program, funds will be made available that can be put to use to enable the Commission to provide more than that CPI-adjusted level of funding in 2015. As I announced earlier this year, using these already collected funds, the Commission will invest an additional \$2 billion in broadband for schools and libraries while continuing to assess the long-term funding needs of the program.

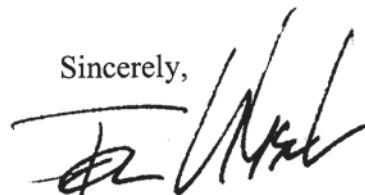
As a first step, I believe we should put those resources to work now to meet our educators’ pent-up demand for upgrading Wi-Fi. But how and when we put those resources to work is very important. According to internal staff estimates, allocating an additional \$1 billion to Wi-Fi next year without updated program rules will allow us to reach fewer than 4 million students, mostly in urban areas. With modernized rules for internal connections, however, E-Rate could help over 10 million students connect to Wi-Fi in their classrooms, including many in rural areas. It would also support Wi-Fi deployment in substantially more libraries than in the past. But timing is critical. Practically speaking, to have an impact in the 2015 school year, the Commission will need to act this summer to adopt new rules. If we don’t move quickly on new rules, we will miss the opportunity for Wi-Fi to have its greatest impact in the coming funding year.

As you correctly point out, there are several other important issues. My focus on Wi-Fi is not to suggest that other steps should not also be taken to modernize the program. I agree that we need to make the hard decision now to begin transitioning the program away from non-broadband services and to broadband services. I also share your goal of ensuring that these funds are spent wisely on the best service at the lowest price in order to stretch these funds to reach as many schools as possible. It is called the E-rate program for a reason, and it is our responsibility to facilitate access to the best possible services at the lowest possible rates. We can take specific actions to address this issue by, for example, facilitating consortium-based applications and requiring greater transparency in the program so that all E-rate beneficiaries have the best possible information when making purchasing decisions. I am also firmly committed to streamlining the application process. Today, for example, I am pleased to say that the Commission has already committed over \$1 billion for the 2014 funding year, which

includes over \$700 million in broadband-related funding – a milestone that has been achieved a full three months faster than in the previous funding year.

E-rate modernization is one of the most important issues before the Commission today. We have an opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of millions of students. Thank you again for your very helpful recommendations. I look forward to working with you toward our mutual goal of increased access to high-speed broadband in our nation's schools.

Sincerely,



Tom Wheeler



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

June 16, 2014

The Honorable Suzan DelBene
U.S. House of Representatives
318 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman DelBene:

Thank you for sharing your views on the importance of modernizing the E-Rate program to provide high-speed broadband to and within all of our nation's schools and libraries. I agree with each of the recommendations in your letter and hope to soon be able to adopt an Order beginning the process of E-rate modernization consistent with the approach you have outlined.

Since its creation as part of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the E-Rate program has provided crucial support to meet the technology needs of schools and libraries. But just as technology and teaching have evolved over the past two decades, so too must E-Rate. The technology tools that supported the educational needs of the Class of 1998 bear virtually no resemblance to those the Classes of 2015 and beyond need to succeed in the 21st Century.

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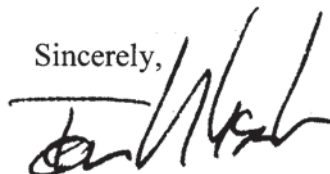
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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Wheeler", with a horizontal line drawn across the middle of the signature.

Tom Wheeler



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

June 16, 2014

The Honorable Susan Davis
U.S. House of Representatives
1526 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congresswoman Davis:

Thank you for sharing your views on the importance of modernizing the E-Rate program to provide high-speed broadband to and within all of our nation's schools and libraries. I agree with each of the recommendations in your letter and hope to soon be able to adopt an Order beginning the process of E-rate modernization consistent with the approach you have outlined.

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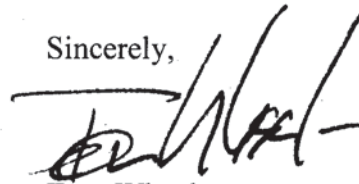
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Sincerely,



Tom Wheeler



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THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

June 16, 2014

The Honorable Steve Israel
U.S. House of Representatives
2457 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Israel:

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maintaining a hallmark of the E-rate program – providing the highest discounts for those schools that need it the most and providing an additional discount for certain rural schools.

In addition to rethinking how we provide support for Wi-Fi, we also need to address funding levels. Just last week I received a letter from 106 organizations calling for an increase in E-rate spending and noting that “the program has effectively been shortchanged by not having any CPI [consumer price index] increase for the first fourteen years of the program.” Others have also called for an inflation adjustment to the program’s budget. Had such a rule been in place when the program was launched, the Commission would provide approximately \$3.25 billion in E-rate support in the upcoming funding year. I am pleased to say that, due to efforts of the Commission’s staff this year in improving the overall management and administration of the E-rate program, funds will be made available that can be put to use to enable the Commission to provide more than that CPI-adjusted level of funding in 2015. As I announced earlier this year, using these already collected funds, the Commission will invest an additional \$2 billion in broadband for schools and libraries while continuing to assess the long-term funding needs of the program.

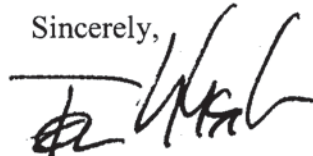
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As you correctly point out, there are several other important issues. My focus on Wi-Fi is not to suggest that other steps should not also be taken to modernize the program. I agree that we need to make the hard decision now to begin transitioning the program away from non-broadband services and to broadband services. I also share your goal of ensuring that these funds are spent wisely on the best service at the lowest price in order to stretch these funds to reach as many schools as possible. It is called the E-rate program for a reason, and it is our responsibility to facilitate access to the best possible services at the lowest possible rates. We can take specific actions to address this issue by, for example, facilitating consortium-based applications and requiring greater transparency in the program so that all E-rate beneficiaries have the best possible information when making purchasing decisions. I am also firmly committed to streamlining the application process. Today, for example, I am pleased to say that the Commission has already committed over \$1 billion for the 2014 funding year, which

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E-rate modernization is one of the most important issues before the Commission today. We have an opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of millions of students. Thank you again for your very helpful recommendations. I look forward to working with you toward our mutual goal of increased access to high-speed broadband in our nation's schools.

Sincerely,

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Tom Wheeler



OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

June 16, 2014

The Honorable Rush Holt
U.S. House of Representatives
1214 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Holt:

Thank you for sharing your views on the importance of modernizing the E-Rate program to provide high-speed broadband to and within all of our nation's schools and libraries. I agree with each of the recommendations in your letter and hope to soon be able to adopt an Order beginning the process of E-rate modernization consistent with the approach you have outlined.

Since its creation as part of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the E-Rate program has provided crucial support to meet the technology needs of schools and libraries. But just as technology and teaching have evolved over the past two decades, so too must E-Rate. The technology tools that supported the educational needs of the Class of 1998 bear virtually no resemblance to those the Classes of 2015 and beyond need to succeed in the 21st Century.

I am especially concerned about the lack of robust Wi-Fi in schools and libraries. Unfortunately, nearly 60% of schools in America lack sufficient Wi-Fi to provide their students and teachers with modern educational tools, and far too many schools simply have no Wi-Fi at all. The current E-rate program rules are simply not set up to meet this challenge. In the most recent funding year, no E-Rate funding was allocated to Wi-Fi. In previous years, when funds were available, E-Rate supported internal connections like Wi-Fi to less than 10 percent of schools and just one percent of libraries, with rural schools consistently receiving a very small percentage of funding for in-classroom connectivity. This is unacceptable.

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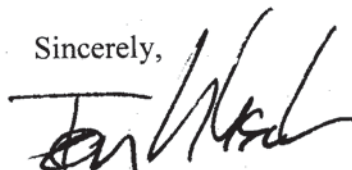
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OFFICE OF
THE CHAIRMAN

FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

June 16, 2014

The Honorable Ron Kind
U.S. House of Representatives
1502 Longworth House Office Building
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Dear Congressman Kind:

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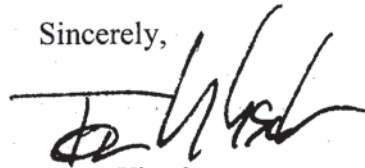
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